The first decade of the Soviet regime’s revolutionary experiment was punctuated by the suicide of two of the era’s greatest poets, Sergei Esenin and Vladimir Mayakovsky. Kenneth M. Pinnow’s well-written book, *Lost to the Collective* uses the phenomenon of suicide to examine how the Soviets understood sources of personality, conceptualized human relations, and viewed individual human behavior—all against the background of the Soviets’ attempt to bring forth a new world. For the regime, and its specialists, suicide became a register and sounding board for their attempts to transform society and individual human nature. Suicide, Pinnow argues, was an important terrain for examining the nexus between the individual and society. In his hands, suicide becomes the lens for analyzing how the Bolsheviks sought to turn their conception of social integration into reality. In examining suicide in early Soviet Russia, Pinnow pursues an explicitly comparative approach, situating the Soviet state within a spectrum of other modern regimes. This perspective is merited not least by the fact that Soviet specialists assiduously compared Soviet conditions and rates of suicide with those of other advanced Western societies. Based on a broad foundation of sources, *Lost to the Collective* employs closely focused and well-argued chapters to study how specific institutional nodes—the Communist Party, the Red Army, forensic medical doctors, social statisticians—understood, tracked, and explained suicide. This impressive book should be of interest to students of Soviet history and more broadly to those interested in the interplay of social science and state policy.”

—Peter Holquist, University of Pennsylvania, author of *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921*

As an act of unbridled individualism, suicide confronted the Bolshevik regime with a dilemma that challenged both its theory and its practice and helped give rise to a social science state whose primary purpose was the comprehensive and rational care of the population. Labeled a social illness and represented as a vestige of prerevolutionary culture, suicide in the 1920s raised troubling questions about individual health and agency in a socialist society, provided a catalyst for the development of new social bonds and subjective outlooks, and became a marker of the country’s incomplete move toward a collectivist society. Determined to eradicate the scourge of self-destruction, the regime created a number of institutions and commissions to identify pockets of disease and foster an integrated social order. The Soviet confrontation with suicide reveals with particular force the regime’s anxieties about the relationship between the state and the individual.

In *Lost to the Collective*, Kenneth M. Pinnow suggests the compatibility of the social sciences with Bolshevik dictatorship and highlights their illusory promises of control over the everyday life of groups and individuals. The book traces the creation of national statistical studies, the course of medical debates about causation and expert knowledge, and the formation of a distinct set of practices in the Bolshevik Party and Red Army that aimed to identify the suicidal individual and establish his or her significance for the rest of society. Arguing that the Soviet regime represents a particular response to the pressures and challenges of modernity, the book examines Soviet socialism—from its intense concern with the individual to its quest to build an integrated society—as one response to the larger question of human unity.

Kenneth M. Pinnow is Associate Professor of History at Allegheny College.
“In this landmark book, suicide becomes an incredibly revealing lens through which to interpret how experts and Bolsheviks diagnosed the health of revolutionary society. Moral statisticians and Red Army political commissars were among the key actors who innovated a distinctive ‘medicopolitics’ in the early Soviet ‘social science state,’ seeking to control a pathology that was above all ideological.”

—Michael David-Fox, Author of Revolution of the Mind

“Kenneth M. Pinnow convinces the reader that suicide tells as much about those speaking about it as about those killing themselves. He shows how early Soviet Russia was trying to make sense of itself through interpreting self-destruction. The government, scholarly institutions, and experts were vying to decipher the suicide’s soul. Unsurprisingly, the government won. Self-destruction was increasingly understood as crime against a collective subject the Bolsheviks did their best to raise and protect from itself. The more they were unsuccessful, the more they shifted blame from the healthy collective to the unhealthy subject they were unable to save. Lost to the Collective is an instructive story told by an excellent historian of medicine, the social sciences, and Soviet suicide.”

—Gábor T. Rittersporn, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

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